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ABSTRACT

Results from an ongoing study investigating talented pupils' adjustment to high school and their attitudes and expectations about high school are reported. In 1979, 57 pupils, identified by their teachers and testing procedures as academically talented, were asked to complete a questionnaire which sought information on how easily they had adjusted to the high school. In 1981 a second group of 57 talented pupils, selected in the same ways as the first group, were asked to complete a checklist on their expectations about high school. In general, results from both studies indicated that academically talented children had problems adjusting to the new high school environment, and that they entered the high school with high expectations and were looking forward to the work being hard enough to make them think. (Author/MP)

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Number 11

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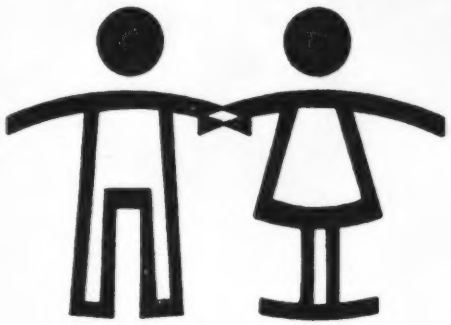

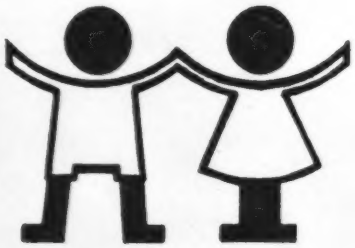

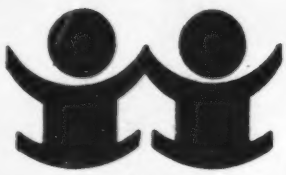

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TALENTED PUPIL'S TRANSITION FROM PRIMARY TO SECONDARY SCHOOLING

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TALENTED PUPIL'S TRANSITION FROM PRIMARY TO SECONDARY SCHOOLING

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INTRODUCTION

An important change in the schooling of our children occurs when they leave primary school and transfer to the secondary system. Not only do they have to cope with a new social environment in which they are the newest and youngest members but they are unfamiliar with the history and customs of their new social environment (Schutz, 1971). It might be expected that academically talented children would be more ready for the transition than the average 12 year old. So it seemed appropriate to ask a group of pupils, identified as talented in their primary schools, about their adjustment to high school.

The design of the ongoing study of academically talented high school pupils has made it possible to quesiton a new group of pupils each year. Evidence obtained from the sample entering high school in 1980 led to the question "Did pupil expectations about high school influence any of the difficulties they found in settling into a secondary school?" In an attempt to find an answer, the group entering high school in 1981 were asked to complete a check list about their expectations during the summer holidays. All 54 children completed the check list and an analysis of their responses is presented and discussed. In addition it has been possible for 10 pupils, who responded to Dr Shelley Phillips' APSP Questionnaire (1979a, b) in Year 6 to answer it again in Year 7, six months after making the transition to a high school. Changes in their responses are presented after a general comparison of the answers of academically talented pupils to the APSP with those from a large random sample of their peers.

Before presenting the data obtained in the research it is necessary to discuss the selection procedures used to obtain the academically talented pupils being studied in this ongoing (longitudinal) investigation.

THE SELECTION OF ACADEMICALLY TALENTED PUPILS

There is no easy procedure for selecting academically talented pupils other than through their performance. For many years psychologists placed faith in intelligence tests, but we have come to realize that an intelligence test is only looking at some aspects of what is required to be a successful student. An individual intelligence test administered by

a trained psychologist can be a valuable guide in judging the likely potential of a person *but* it must be remembered that a pupil's performance can vary from day to day. For example, in the present study, a boy, selected by his teacher as academically talented, did not give his best performance during an administration of the WISC-R individual intelligence test because he became very concerned about his failure to respond to a question. Even though he was assured that 15 year olds could not answer all the questions, this 11 year old boy could not overcome his concern about a possible mistake he had made.

A complementary assessment to an intelligence test is the set of observations made over the years by parents and teachers. Parent observations are particularly valuable in the preschool years. In later primary school it is the teacher who is able to compare one child's performance with his or her peers. Not all observable signs of talent are necessarily pleasing to a teacher. For example, youngsters who pick up inconsistencies in what the teacher has said, or become curious about aspects the teacher is not familiar with are not always popular with teachers. *The Report into the Education of the Talented Child* (Macdonald, 1977) sets out behaviours that a teacher should consider when identifying talented pupils. The neat, careful worker who gets 10 out of 10 for mathematics and spells correctly would not be classed as academically talented unless that child also showed curiosity about life and a desire to quesiton and solve problems.

In the study reported by Pegnato (1965) teachers appeared to be poor predictors of academic potential, although an examination of this research indicates that the teachers were given no guidelines to assist in their selection of pupils. These problems were avoided in the present study by giving the teachers a check list as an aid to selecting their academically talented pupils.

Primary school principals, whose schools were approximately within a mile radius of the University of New South Wales, were approached and requested to identify talented pupils they considered would benefit from a once-a-week programme offered at the School of Education. To aid selection, teachers were given copies of a check list to use for any pupils they regarded as talented in years 4, 5, and 6. Then, after consultation with the principal of the school, a letter was sent home to the parents of the selected pupils inviting the children into an enrichment programme offered by the University of New South Wales' School of Education. In the first year of the study all parents agreed to their invited children taking part.

A second group was obtained from the Year 6 OC class at Woollahra Primary School. Pupil selection for the OC class is through a special testing programme administered to pupils in Year 4 who attend a State school. Parents who send their children to a non-state school can make arrangements with the regional education office for their child to take the test. If a child is offered a place in an OC class the parents have the right to decide whether the offer will be accepted.

The academically talented pupils in the present study have thus been selected in two ways: (a) through teacher observation guided by a check list; and (b) through a testing procedure which occurred in Year 4 to give them entry to an OC class.

Parents' consent to their child's participation in the study was an essential requirement in both selection procedures outlined. While parents

of children who attended the enrichment programme at the University of New South Wales readily agreed to their children participating, only two thirds of parents whose children attended Year 6 at an OC class returned the consent form. The sample of talented pupils taking part in the study is not a random selection of all academically talented pupils in the Eastern Suburbs. But through working with these young people some useful data has been obtained to assist in the development of a model of educating clever pupils in the secondary school.

ADJUSTMENT OF TALENTED PUPILS TO HIGH SCHOOL

In 1979 fiftyseven pupils were selected for the transition study, 18 through teacher observations and 39 from Year 6 OC classes. In April 1980 they were requested to complete a questionnaire which sought information on how easily these academically talented pupils had adjusted to the high school. On the whole they appeared to have enjoyed the initial challenge of the new school environment. However, responses to three sections of the questionnaire are worthy of closer analysis.

1. *Subject Teachers and Subjects*

Asked whether they preferred having different subject teachers or a class teacher as in the primary school, 46 (80.7%) nominated different subject teachers. The main reasons given were that subject teachers tended to be more expert in the subjects they taught and that the pupils liked the variety of teaching methods during the day. Nine pupils, however, longed for the more personal relationship with the teacher that is only possible in the primary school. Of the two who had difficulty answering the question, one boy commented "Knowing the subject is an advantage in having subject teachers but one teacher gets to know you well.".

While the pupils were very positive about the subjects they liked or did well in, just under half the group (27) had subjects that they did not like and six of them listed two dislikes. Seven pupils admitted that the difficulty of the work was causing them to dislike a subject such as mathematics or languages. But the most common reason given was that the subject was boring. Some pupils saw their dislike of a subject as due to the teacher. Teachers who taught the less traditional subjects such as consumer affairs, health education or music, tended to be the ones blamed for the pupil's dislike of the subject.

2. *Homework*

There was reasonable satisfaction about having to do homework, although several commented that there was considerable variation in the amount of homework set on any one night. One boy and four girls considered that they had too much homework. Teachers are apt to forget just how time consuming a project can be for a talented pupil who takes the research seriously and then has to write it up attractively to please the teacher. One pupil in particular expressed dissatisfaction with having to cut out pictures and paste them into the project book. Is picture pasting the best way of training these lively minds? Surely it is more important for them to develop research techniques so that they can seek out knowledge and reason through

problems for themselves.

2. *Problems of Adjustment*

All but seven pupils experienced one or more of the difficulties listed in Table 1 during their first few weeks at their new school.

TABLE 1

Pupils Responses to "Causes of Difficulty at School" Items

Causes of Difficulty at School	Frequency of Choice Girls %	Boys %
Getting to school on time	29	9
Finding your way to different classrooms	32	51
Knowing what subjects you have during the day	8	25
Bringing the correct books to class	16	15
Bullying	4	19
Getting to know other pupils	24	16
Having to be involved in an initiation ceremony	0	3
Knowing what the set homework was	20	22
Knowing when the homework had to be finished	24	16
Knowing what the school rules were	36	25
Knowing how to join a particular school group	16	32
Travelling home after school	12	3
Other	12	16

Of the 13 items listed in Table 1 "Knowing the school rules" concerned most girls and "Finding your way to different classes" worried most boys when they first entered high school. The pupils were then asked whether they still had problems. Almost 60% of the group acknowledged that even at the end of the first term they still faced difficulties. The most common one concerned books; carrying them to classes, knowing which books would be required, and having a convenient storage place for books no longer needed. Three pupils were in need of information about how to join a particular school group, and three were having difficulty getting home after school. One girl who had broken her arm found the crowded school bus in which she had to travel home a very distressing experience.

When noting that academically able youngsters faced problems in adjusting to high school it is important to consider the problems that must face more average pupils. Unless a high school adopts a special policy of acquainting new pupils with the geography, traditions and social perspectives of the school the initial transition is likely to be perplexing and worrying for most pupils.

EXPECTATIONS OF TALENTED PUPILS ABOUT HIGH SCHOOL

It was argued that problems which the 1980 transition group experienced might have been due to their expectations of what high school would be like. Poole and Williams (1977) examined the writings of creative Year 6 pupils going on to high schools in Victoria and then their responses one year later. These researchers found that the Year 6 pupils were optimistic about the change although they expected to have to work harder if they were to achieve at high school.

Power and Cotterell (1979) undertook an extensive study of 885 pupils from 34 classrooms who were going on to high schools in the following year. In the present study their Student Expectations Scale was given to 54 young people beginning high school in 1981. The 54 academically talented pupils were selected in the same ways as the first group: 17 had been identified through teacher observations guided by a check list and 37 had won and accepted places in an OC class at Woollahra Primary School.

TABLE 2

*Responses to "Student Expectation Scale" **

Items	Frequency of Choice Girls % (N=22)	Boys % (N=32)	
1. I expect *the older kids* at high school to be			
(a) friendly and helpful to us	82	50	
(b) unfriendly and not interested in us	14	47	**
(c) bullies and pick on us	5	3	
2. I expect *the school work* to be			
(a) hard to do	9	38	**
(b) easy to do	5	0	
(c) just hard enough to make me think	86	63	
3. I think *the subjects* at high school will be			
(a) interesting	100	88	
(b) boring	0	3	
(c) just more work	0	6	
4. The high school *teachers* will probably be			
(a) very firm and strict with us	55	75	
(b) friendly and not very strict	41	25	
(c) not very interested in us	5	0	
5. The *school itself* will be			
(a) noisy, crowded and untidy	0	9	
(b) well equipped and pleasant	45	66	
(c) well organized and business like	55	25	

Table continues on page 6.

Items	Frequency of Choice Girls % (N=22)	Boys % (N=32)
6. As a *Year 7 student* I expect that I will be		
(a) a bit worried and confused for a while	59	66
(b) a bit unhappy and lonely at high school	5	6
(c) happily enjoying the school from the start	36	28
7. In my *first year* at high school, I expect to		
(a) do as well as I can in my subjects	86	88
(b) enjoy things and have fun each day	14	3
(c) keep out of trouble as much as possible	0	9
8. As I think about high school		
(a) I'm looking forward to it very much	73	63
(b) I'm looking forward a bit to going there	18	31
(c) I'm not really looking forward to high school.	9	6

* This scale is used through courtesy of C. Power and I. Cotterell

** Significant at the .01 level

The selected pupils were asked to check the appropriate answers on the form and return it to the School of Education by January 23, 1981. Analysis of their responses, set out in Table 2, indicates that the 1981 group has an optimistic view of the high school judging from their selection in item 8. There are some differences between boys and girls. For example, significantly more boys saw older high school pupils as unfriendly and not interested in them. As in the Poole and Williams study the pupils expected the work to be challenging but 38% of boys (compared with 9% of girls) thought that the school work would be hard.

All the girls expect the subjects at high school to be interesting. It will be worth noting whether the high expectations of the girls leads them to be more verbal about the subjects they dislike. In analysing the results of the 57 pupils who entered Year 7 in 1980, girls seemed more willing to express their dissatisfaction with the subjects (73% of the girls compared with 32% of the boys).

In item 4 the majority of pupils considered high school teachers would be very firm and strict, but 41% of girls and 25% of the boys thought they would be friendly and not very strict. There is a tendency for girls to consider the school will be well organized and business-like whereas the boys expect it to be well equipped. Both boys and girls anticipate that they will be a bit worried and confused for a time although 31% (36% of girls and 28% of boys) expect to happily enjoy school from the beginning. Results obtained from the 1980 group showed only 12% checked no problems in adjusting to high school. It will be interesting to see whether the 17 children's expectations of enjoyment will enable them to settle in more quickly to high school life. Although more expect to do well in their first year at high school three boys (9%) see their task as keeping out of trouble.

A breakdown of the data in relation to those 37 pupils who spent Years 5 and 6 in an OC class and the 17 who remained in their primary schools showed only two items where differences were beyond the 1% level of significance. More OC pupils expected the older students to be unfriendly and not interested in them; and they were more inclined to expect the teachers to be friendly and not very strict. It could be that their personal contact with the teachers during Years 5 and 6 helped them to see teachers as persons rather than authority figures. They would also have some concern about meeting again pupils that had been ahead of them in their old primary schools before they left to take up the OC placement.

ATTITUDES OF TALENTED PUPILS

Dr Phillips in *Young Australians* (1979a) describes responses to her measure of authoritarian attitudes (the APSP Questionnaire) obtained from a large random sample of 2,279 fifth and sixth year pupils attending state primary schools in Sydney. When the APSP Questionnaire was given to the talented primary school pupils in 1979, in the first year of the enrichment programme at the School of Education, interest focused on whether these talented children differed in any of their responses from Phillips' random sample.

In 1980 the APSP was given to the new group of pupils entering the enrichment programme. Thus data was available for 29 pupils who responded to the questionnaire in 1979 and 18 who answered it in 1980.

1. Differences Between The Talented Groups

When combining the two talented groups it was decided not to take account of items showing more than a 10% difference between the 1979 and 1980 groups. No percentage differences between the two talented groups reached a 1% level although four items showed a difference at the 5% level of significance. These were: item 2, "Children can't be expected to do good work unless teachers always tell them exactly what is to be done"; item 28, "Girls are silly and weak"; item 37, "Migrants should eat and live like Australians and forget their old ways"; and item 47, "Girls wouldn't make good engineers".

2. Differences Between Talented And "Average" Groups.

The significantly lower percentage of agreement shown in Table 3 for the combined talented groups responding to items 19, 26, 31, 41, and 43 would suggest that these pupils have a more tolerant view of differences among people. They can even disagree with wanting to get their own back on people who do something bad to them (see item 24). Yet item 12, "It is possible to tell by a person's face whether he is honest or dishonest", and item 32, "People who commit crimes are naturally bad", are not included in Table 3 because they showed close agreement with the random sample in Phillips' study.

TABLE 3

Items on the APSP Questionnaire indicating differences beyond the 1% level of significance between the talented Years 4, 5, & 6 pupils and the random sample of Years 5 and 6 pupils.

	Item	Samples: Random % (N=2279)	Samples: Talented * % (N=47)
5	No matter what it is you might do, there is only one right way to do it.	68	44
17	It is silly for men to be nurses.	44	19
19	It is always better to keep different races separate.	47	19
22	People with a lot of education are usually rat bags.	32	4
24	If someone does something bad to you it is always a good idea to get your own back.	57	21
26	If a person doesn't like the way our country does things he should just keep his mouth shut.	63	40
29	Teachers should tell children what to do and not try to find out what children want.	39	21
31	How a kid dresses or looks is usually the best test of what he is like.	43	25
36	Girls should only learn the things that are useful around the house.	29	10
39	When people are watching me I can't work well and make a lot of mistakes	68	48
40	I don't often come up with new ideas	40	12
41	Migrants cause a lot of trouble in Australia.	59	34
43	Weak people should not have as much say in running the country as strong people.	35	10

* Items where the 1979 and 1980 samples of talented children showed differences between groups of more than 10% were rejected as showing instability between groups. Only items 2, 38, 37 and 47 reached a 5% level of significance between groups.

Not surprisingly, the talented pupils have a more positive view of people with a lot of education (item 22) and they are more tolerant of people watching them at work (item 39) although almost half of them agreed they did not work as well under scrutiny. Items 5, 29, and 40 suggest that academically talented pupils are more flexible. Their responses to items 17 and 36 suggest that they do not have a stereotyped view of what is men's and women's work. Yet some apparent inconsistencies do occur in their thinking on social issues. For example, their somewhat mixed views about girls not making good engineers (item 47) and their belief that honesty or dishonesty is written on a person's face (item 12).

3. *Changes in Attitudes of Talented Pupils Moving From Primary School to High School*

Of the 29 pupils completing the APSP Questionnaire in 1979, 18 were in Year 6. Unfortunately, it was only possible for 10 of those 18 pupils to take the APSP again in Year 7. A sample of 10 does not enable definite conclusions to be drawn, but it is interesting to note some of the trends.

TABLE 4

Items where over one quarter of the pupils changed their responses in a particular direction for 10 pupils who completed the APSP Questionnaire in Year 6 and then one year later.

	Item	Frequency of Choice Year 6 (n)	Year 7 (n)
2	Children can't be expected to do good work unless teachers always tell them exactly what should be done.	2	5
5	No matter what it is you may try to do, there is only one right way to do it.	3	0
12	It is possible to tell by a person's face whether he is honest or dishonest.	4	1
14	A kid should always support the leader of his gang even if he sometimes disagrees	6	2
29	Teachers should tell children what to do and not try to find out what children want.	3	0
32	People who commit crimes are naturally bad.	4	1

Table 4 sets out those items where the number agreeing with a statement changed in a definite direction with three or more pupils making the change. Item 2 is the only one in which 3 or more pupils changed towards agreement with the statement. Probably the insecurity these young people felt in

meeting the demands of various teachers, rather than the one classroom teacher, made them desire precision when giving the requirements for written work. It is interesting that in the 1980 sample of talented primary school pupils responding to the questionnaire more agreed with item 2 than did the pupils in the 1979 group. In Year 7 will these children show the same tendency in requiring teachers to "always tell pupils exactly what to do"? While the 10 pupils show a preference for knowing exactly what teachers want, the response to item 29 would suggest that they want a teacher who is considerate of pupils' wishes and ideas and not a grand dictator who pushes on regardless. In the light of their responses to item 29 it would seem that these pupils had ignored the word "always" in item 2.

Three pupils no longer agree that it is possible to tell from a person's face whether he is honest or dishonest or that people who commit crimes are naturally bad. All 10 pupils in Year 7 disagree with the view that there is only one right way to do a thing and the reduction in support of item 14, "A kid should always support the leader of his gang even if he sometimes disagrees", would indicate a considerable growth towards moral autonomy.

There were items that showed no change. These are set out in Table 5.

TABLE 5

Items showing no changes with the same pupils agreeing on both trials for 10 pupils who completed the APSP Questionnaire in Year 6 and then one year later.

	Item	Frequency of Choice Year 6 (n)	Year 7 (n)
8	The position of the stars at the time of your birth determine your personality and what will happen to you.	1	1
11	Breaking a mirror bings 7 years bad luck.	0	0
16	I like to discover new things.	10	10
19	It is always better to keep different races separate.	0	0
22	People with a lot of education are usually rat bags.	1	1
27	You can protect yourself from bad luck by carrying a charm or good luck piece.	0	0
37	Migrants should eat and live like Australians and forget their own ways.	0	0

Year 7 pupils are still relatively free from looking to various forms of superstition to explain their successes and failures. They also continue to maintain a positive approach to education by disagreeing with item 22. The one boy who still agrees with the idea that the position of the stars at the time of birth affect our personalities is the same one who regards people with a lot of education as usually being rat bags. This lad has two older brothers who are not academically inclined. The parents are naturally keen that he makes the most of his talent, but he is probably influenced by his older brothers and their negative attitudes to education. He points up a problem faced by families who might have one child with academic potential yet that potential is not valued by older, admired siblings.

DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

From the data discussed in this paper it is obvious that academically talented children face problems in adjusting to the new high school environment. Being academically talented these pupils are more confident in verbalizing their troubles, so indicating to secondary school teachers where worries are likely to occur for transition pupils. As the group of pupils attend 22 different High Schools in the Eastern Suburbs of Sydney particular difficulties will apply to some schools more than others. For example, most teachers would be experienced in stating the homework requirements clearly, but obviously some of the pupils had teachers who did not take the time necessary to ensure pupils knew exactly what was required. The same comment would apply to the other difficulties set out in Table 1.

As expected, the 1981 sample of talented Year 7 pupils entered high school with high expectations and were looking forward to the work being hard enough to make them think. One problem for a high school teacher, even when working in a school with streamed classes, is to challenge the brightest while ensuring the less able children are motivated to keep up with the work. The two procedures of enrichment or acceleration have been used by people interested in the education of the talented (Reid, 1976). Enrichment could do much to develop creativity, the ability to see a variety of procedures leading to the same goal, or to see the differences choice may have on the goals (Gowan, 1980). However, some subject teachers need support in developing challenging enrichment programmes for able pupils as well as meeting the normal curriculum demands for the class.

An essential aspect in the education of the academically talented is their social attitudes. Results obtained from the APSP Questionnaire indicate that the academically talented are more tolerant of differences among people and less inclined to accept without question, authoritarian statements that are common in our society. However, an analysis of their responses suggest that during the high school years bright pupils need a good grounding in logic and the exact meaning of such words as "always" "exactly" and "only". They would probably also benefit from a closer study of the behaviour and attitudes of other people. History is a valuable discipline in helping teenagers to comprehend how laws are made in a country and why, for example, a crime might be committed by a "good" person.

Although this ongoing research is still at the initial stages, ideas are beginning to emerge for a model of educating academically talented pupils in the high school years.

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